

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 22, 2023

The Honorable Frank Kendall  
Secretary of the Air Force  
1670 Air Force Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20330-1670

Dear Secretary Kendall,

We write today to vehemently oppose the unprecedented and shocking political targeting of conservatives and the suppression of participation by off-duty military members in the democratic process recently perpetrated by Minot Air Force Base leadership. We are exercising our congressional oversight by demanding that answers be immediately provided and that those responsible be held accountable for this exceptionally troubling attempt to inject political bias into the Air Force and to dissuade our service members from exercising their right to participate in the process while maintaining their conservative beliefs.

Beginning on January 20, 2021, there has been a disturbing trend throughout the military of targeting conservatives for their sincerely held religious and political beliefs. This trend runs counter to the bedrock notion that our military must remain an apolitical, nonpartisan organization that is focused on fighting and winning America's wars. It is not the role of Air Force leadership to impose their personal political beliefs on those they lead, and it is absolutely unacceptable for anyone in leadership to threaten the careers of those that don't agree with them politically. Unfortunately, it has become crystal clear that under the current administration, the only way to advance and attain general and flag officer ranks is to support, endorse, and push President Biden's partisan agenda at every available opportunity.

Prior to a planned November 17<sup>th</sup> event known as the "Dakota Patriot Rally," leadership at Minot Air Force Base sent an appalling warning to Airmen serving at Minot Air Force Base urging them to, "please exercise caution if downtown this weekend" and stating that, "participation with groups such as Turning Point Action could jeopardize their continued service in the U.S. military." While we recognize and agree that the Airmen should not be participating in political events while in uniform, when service members are on personal time, they should be afforded the liberty to exercise their First Amendment rights in a lawful manner.

While we certainly believe that the military must remain institutionally apolitical, the military should not promote one political view or party over the other and should encourage, not dissuade or prevent participation in the political process for members on their personal time. This should and must be equally applied across the entire political spectrum. However, under your leadership

and across the Department of Defense, conservative beliefs are consistently targeted and unjustifiably attacked, while racist, partisan, and destructive diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts are celebrated and praised. This trend of political bias has clearly trickled down to the wing, group, and squadron levels where aspiring future senior leaders know that they must advance these radical efforts that wrongfully target conservative beliefs in order to advance in their own careers.

The actions taken by Minot's leadership show a complete disregard for the rights of American Airmen to maintain and even participate in the political process when off duty in accordance with their own conscience and sincerely held political beliefs. While it is true that service members agree to abide by service regulations in the exercise of their political rights, it is not mandated under any regulation or instruction that they abandon all political viewpoints upon entry into the service. Indeed, service members retain the right to hold political views and participate in the very democratic process they swear to protect. By contradicting this principle, the actions taken by Minot's leadership have two harmful consequences upon the Airmen stationed there. First, Airmen who maintain politically conservative views may question the fair and equitable treatment they may receive from service and base leadership when it comes to career advancement. Second, these same Airmen are now dissuaded from exercising their constitutional rights due to the chilling effect of Minot leadership's not-so-veiled threat against them. The inevitable result of this action will be calling into question for every Airman at Minot whether the next event they may consider attending could result in the end of their career. Until these failed leadership practices are punished and the responsible parties are held accountable, such activity will continue to be carried out across the force.

While the political bias shown in this case is clear and severely distressing, the disregard for facts from the leadership at Minot Air Force Base is also very troubling. The text message at issue goes on further to state that the "guest speaker is from an alt-right organization called Turning Point Action," referencing Tyler Bowyer, Chief Operating Officer of Turning Point Action. The claim that Turning Point Action, a mainstream conservative organization, is an "alt-right" entity that may represent a threat is categorically false, and Mr. Bowyer is a highly respected conservative who advocates for beliefs shared by millions of Americans across the country, including strong support for our military. The willingness to arbitrarily label an individual and political organization as "alt-right" without grounds to support such a claim leads to the obvious conclusion that such labeling is nothing more than the personal and political opinion of someone in leadership, and it sets the stage for a host of problems regarding imposition of unjust restrictions based solely on personal opinion rather than fact.

This is merely the latest example in a long list of occurrences demonstrating that our military is currently trending in the wrong direction, and this plague of wokeness starts at the top and is filtering down through the ranks. At a time when you have stated that your three primary concerns are "China, China, and China," and when we should be focused on confronting the global threats that threaten our interests, our senior military leadership unfortunately seems more intent on targeting conservatives, advocating for woke social policies, and threatening those who maintain different political viewpoints.

Given this completely unacceptable situation, we will be exercising congressional oversight by demanding that all correspondence regarding the November 17<sup>th</sup> event be provided to us no later than November 30<sup>th</sup>. Further, prior to November 30<sup>th</sup> we also demand to know the names of those responsible for this highly partisan political effort and that they be removed from any current leadership role. Lastly, we request answers to the following questions by November 30<sup>th</sup>:

1. By what means was it determined that the Dakota Patriot Rally was a threat and who made such a determination?
2. Who on base knew of, endorsed, or otherwise directed the text message that was received by Minot Air Force Base Airmen regarding attendance at the Dakota Patriot Rally?
3. If neither the 5<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing nor the 91<sup>st</sup> Missile Wing commander or deputy commander was involved in this event, what individuals directed the sending of the text message received by Minot Airmen and for what reason were the wing commanders intentionally left out of this decision?
4. Did anyone at Minot Air Force Base consult with any superior commander at 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force, 20<sup>th</sup> Air Force, or Global Strike Command prior to sending the text message at issue?
  - a. If so, who was involved and what specifically was discussed?
5. What was base leadership's evidentiary basis for telling Airmen they needed to "exercise caution" and "be careful" and that attendees at the Dakota Patriot Rally "could be confrontational to military members?"
  - a. Did the Air Force Office of Special Investigations, FBI, or any other law enforcement or intelligence agency receive any credible intelligence or threats towards military members upon which this "warning" was based?
6. Was the staff judge advocate at any level of command within Global Strike Command consulted prior to the text message being sent out to Minot Airmen?
  - a. If so, what was the advice of the staff judge advocate regarding the legality of the text message's contents?
  - b. If no staff judge advocate was consulted, what was the command rationale for not seeking legal advice prior to the text message being sent?
7. The text message indicated that part of the issue with attendance at the Dakota Patriot Rally was the attendance of Tyler Bowyer, a member of Turning Point Action, which leadership deemed to be an "alt-right" group. Does the Air Force maintain a master list of groups considered alt-right or extremist?
  - a. If so, please provide a copy of the current list along with information regarding who has the authority to place an individual or group on the list and the criteria for labeling a group as "alt-right" or extremist.
  - b. Does the Air Force maintain a list of "alt-left" or extremist groups?
    - i. If no such list exists, please explain what safeguards the Air Force has put into place to ensure that ad hoc decisions naming individuals or groups as "alt-right" or extremist are truly mission essential determinations designed to protect Airmen and the mission rather than merely the opinions or personal and political preferences of those in leadership positions?
8. Did Minot Air Force Base leadership consider the potential chilling effects that telling Airmen that "participation with groups such as Turning Point Action could jeopardize

their continued service in the U.S. military” could have on their political participation in the democratic process?

9. Pursuant to AFI 51-508, “Political Activities, Free Speech and Freedom of Assembly of Air Force Personnel,” paragraphs 2.3 and 2.4 outline a number of permitted and prohibited activities for military members. What provision of AFI 51-508 would mere attendance while not in uniform at the Dakota Patriot Rally violate?
  - a. If Airmen felt dissuaded by base leadership’s wrongful actions from participating in an otherwise lawful exercise of their First Amendment rights, what actions does the Air Force intend to take against members of base leadership for violating AFI 51-508’s punitive articles?
10. Does the Air Force intend to launch an investigation into the conduct at issue at the SAF/IGQ level?
  - a. If so, who has been appointed as the investigating officer?
  - b. If SAF/IGQ will not be investigating this matter, will any subordinate IG be tasked with investigating these matters?

After all relevant materials are delivered, we request a briefing be provided to Congress no later than December 7<sup>th</sup> to provide an update on the situation and to discuss the troubling findings, the actions taken by the Department, and to answer any remaining questions. It is our hope that this information will be provided voluntarily in a timely manner and that adequate accountability will occur within your Department.

We share a common goal of defending our great nation. Therefore, it is time that the Biden administration stop pushing divisive policies through any means available to include our military services. This type of behavior has no place in the military, and we look forward to your cooperation on such a pressing matter.

Sincerely,



Ronny L. Jackson  
Member of Congress



Mark E. Green, M.D.  
Member of Congress



Matt Gaetz  
Member of Congress



Cory Mills  
Member of Congress



Pat Fallon  
Member of Congress

Letter to SECAF re Minot Air Force Base Leadership

CC:

General Thomas Bussiere  
Commander, Global Strike Command

Colonel Daniel Hoadley  
Commander, 5<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing

Colonel Kenneth McGhee  
Commander, 91<sup>st</sup> Missile Wing